



Delaware County Juvenile Court

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Juvenile Court Breaks New Ground with Assessment Center

DELAWARE, Ohio — Continuing to break new ground in the field of juvenile justice, the Delaware County Juvenile Court has opened the first juvenile assessment center in Delaware County's history. Funded entirely by a grant from the Ohio Department of Youth Services, the center will implement cutting edge practices to continue the county's trend of reducing the cost, personal impact, and future implications of juvenile delinquency.

“For too long, juvenile justice in America has been purely *reactive* — waiting for a juvenile to commit a delinquent act and then asking, ‘why didn't someone intervene sooner?’” said Delaware County Probate/Juvenile Court Judge David Hejmanowski. “It is time that we learn from the overwhelming successes of the medical system’s efforts toward preventative care. It is time that we assess early home and school unruly behavior and ensure that appropriate interventions are available to all families in Delaware County so that those early behaviors do not grow into more serious acts.”

Funded by a competitive RECLAIM grant from the Ohio Department of Youth Services, the Assessment Center began providing preliminary services in its new home on Nov. 1 in the Willis Education Center, 74 W. William St, Delaware. Space for the Assessment Center generously has been provided by the Delaware City Schools and the United Way Strengthening Families Initiative, which already provides a number of community resources in the Willis Education Center.

“We are looking forward to continuing to partner with Delaware County Juvenile Court and United Way Strengthening Families to support our students and their families,” said Delaware City Schools Superintendent Heidi Kegley. “The Assessment Center is going to be an exciting enhancement to the services and supports currently in place.”

The Assessment Center is part of a growing initiative to serve juveniles in the least restrictive setting and also to intervene with children exhibiting problem behaviors before they become formally involved with the juvenile justice system. As its name suggests, youth referred to the Assessment Center will receive a series of assessments and screenings to determine both youth-specific and family needs. Based on the outcome of those assessments, youth will be referred to any number of community partners to meet those needs and the assessments will inform the decision whether youth will be either diverted from formal court involvement.

A growing body of research demonstrates that low-risk youth have better outcomes when served outside of a traditional courtroom setting. Ruchelle Pride, Supervisor of the Assessment Center explained that “formal court involvement for low-risk youth can actually increase a youth’s risk of reoffending and becoming more involved in the juvenile justice system. With this in mind, we must meet youth and families where they are in an effort to mitigate risk while providing meaningful supports.”

The Assessment Center will also provide services for at-risk youth who may be referred by a parent, law enforcement, school, or other community partner, thereby enabling parents, teachers, and law enforcement to have a reliable method of early intervention. The same assessment process will help Assessment Center staff determine the needs of at-risk youth and their families with the goal of facilitating linkage between youth and families in need and community partners who have resources to meet the needs.

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“Delaware County is a resource rich community,” said Pride. “The goal of the Assessment Center is to help connect youth and families in need with resources to meet those needs, with the ultimate goal of intervening early so that we don’t see those families penetrate the Court system further down the road. It is imperative that we develop an intentional pattern of being proactive versus reactive!”

Parents and community members can make a referral to the assessment center by calling 740-833-1867.

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